

By Mark Ray

KEYS TO SUCCESS

An **Eagle Scout** pianist makes his mark on the concert stage and beyond.

Juilliard-trained concert pianist Kevin Kwan Loucks (Eagle Class of 2000) has played Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Seoul Arts Center and other top performance spaces. But one of his favorite venues lies far from New York, Washington or his Santa Barbara home — far from much of anything, aside from a very large hole in the ground.

It's the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, where Loucks and three colleagues spent four weeks in the Artists-in-Residence Program in August 2014. Selected from a pool of more than 400 applicants, they performed concerts, led master classes and soaked up the park's incomparable beauty.

"Being in the Grand Canyon for that long was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience," he says. "I would go for late-night walks and runs on the pathways that hugged the inner canyon; it's just so good to be outside."

Thanks to his experience with Boy Scout Troop 125 in Santa Rosa, Calif., Loucks has always viewed the outdoors as a refuge from the world of practice and performance.


"Playing an instrument at a high level requires so much time and energy; you can spend eight hours a day practicing and still feel like there's so much work to do," he says. "I believe that Scouts provided a much-needed balance to that kind of regimen."

But Scouting offered him more than just the chance to exercise muscles besides his fingers. It exposed him to people who weren't practicing piano eight hours a day — or at all — and were interested in totally different pursuits.

"It teaches you that everybody is on their own path and exploring different things, allowing you to reflect and appreciate the path that you yourself are on," he says. "It can create lifelong friendships and relationships with people you wouldn't have ordinarily met, and for that I am grateful."

MAKING MUSIC ...

Loucks began playing piano at around age 3, when his grandfather noticed he was picking up tunes by ear and could play music from TV on the instrument. Although he also played trombone in school, he settled on the piano as his instrument of choice, eventually earning piano performance

A man in a dark suit and tie is shown in profile, playing a black grand piano. He is looking down at the keys. The piano is on the left side of the frame. The background is dark with some out-of-focus lights, suggesting an indoor setting like a concert hall or a practice room. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong light source from the top left creating a bright glow and casting shadows.

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He also likes the constant challenges chamber music presents.

“Iryna or Ross may do something like voice a particular passage in a way I’ve never heard, and I will have to respond to those nuances,” he says. “That process forces you to be engaged and is one of the most exciting aspects of collaboration.”

... AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Trio Céleste’s second album is due out this year, but that’s just one project in which Loucks is involved. He spends as much time as an educator and arts administrator as he does as a performer. In 2012, he and Krechkovsky formed Chamber Music | OC to bring world-class arts and arts education to Orange County, Calif.

“There were some wonderful youth programs and organizations in the area, but none that were really promoting the art of chamber music through performance, education and outreach,” he says.

Trio Céleste is the organization’s ensemble-in-residence, but Chamber Music | OC has hosted an array of top-flight performers for recitals and master classes. And some 40 students participate in the group’s Pre-College Program, which Krechkovsky leads and which has successfully placed graduates at the Eastman School of Music, The Juilliard School, Northwestern University, the Peabody Institute of Music, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Stanford University, among others.

In 2017, Chamber Music | OC was featured in a sold-out Carnegie Hall performance that included students, guest artists and Trio Céleste.

“That program was a nice balance because it featured the trio, the next generation of students that we’re cultivating through our youth programs, some of our mentors and colleagues whom we love and love playing with,” Loucks says.

Trio Céleste (above) is a chamber music group featuring (left to right) cellist Ross Gasworth, pianist (and Eagle Scout) Kevin Kwan Loucks and violinist Iryna Krechkovsky, Loucks’ wife. Loucks started his Scouting career as a Webelos Scout in Santa Rosa, Calif., and later earned the rank of Eagle with Troop 125.

wife, violinist Iryna Krechkovsky, formed an award-winning duet in 2004. Eight years later, they founded a group called Trio Céleste with cellist Ross Gasworth. Together, they’ve done everything from playing the complete piano trios of Ludwig van Beethoven to commissioning brand new works by important modern composers. The trio’s self-titled debut album appeared in 2016, debuting at No. 5 on iTunes for new classical releases.

A reviewer for the *Orange County Register* praised the album, writing, “The elegant polish these players exhibit as a group and as individuals never gets in the way of intimate expression.”

The interplay between group and individual is one reason chamber music appeals to Loucks.

“It really is designed so that everybody can be heard and that everybody’s contributing equally,” he says.

And there, too, he sees a connection to Scouting.

“Whether you’re participating in camporees, jamborees or your weekly Scout meetings, all of these activities require buy-in; they require the talents and the skills of every single person to be successful,” he says.



degrees from the University of California, Irvine (Bachelor of Music), the Juilliard School (Master of Music) and Stony Brook University (Doctor of Musical Arts).

The piano is often considered a solo instrument, but Loucks was never drawn to the life of a solo concert pianist, as glorious as it might seem to audiences.

“You’re very much by yourself a lot of the time,” he says, including long hours spent in airports, rehearsal suites and lonely hotel rooms.

He found chamber music — music played by small groups like trios and quartets — much more appealing. He and his future

Loucks addresses the audience during a performance at Soka Performing Arts Center, a concert hall at Soka University of America in Aliso Viejo, Calif.



“[My Scoutmaster] Shawn Hanna was an exemplary leader and mentor to me. He possesses the rare ability to instill a sense of discipline while also having a good time.”

LONG-TERM IMPACT

Although he’s not yet 40 years old, Loucks says he’s already thinking about his long-term impact on the world of music.

“As a performer in the classical music industry, limits exist to how many people you can directly impact — and even though a career in teaching is both significant and meaningful, it, too, can be capped by capacity issues,” he says. “But administration opens up a whole new door, because you can support structures that are investing in new talent. If the market evolves in an efficient way, then performers and teachers alike will be able to enjoy sustainable careers while maximizing their individual impact.”

So Loucks added another line to his résumé in 2018 by joining the Music Academy of the West as senior director of innovation and program development. In one year, he has launched an after-school choral program called “Sing!” that serves more than 200 children in 30 area schools, and he’s responsible for a co-commission with the London Symphony Orchestra of a new children’s opera slated for debut in 2022.

“The ‘Sing!’ program is an incredible community initiative enabling our kids and the entire community to come together in new and exciting ways,” he says.

He also oversees the group’s new Innovation Institute, which includes the Alumni Enterprise Awards program, the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Residential, and the Summer Innovation

Curriculum — programs that help artists hone the business and marketing skills they need in order to be successful today.

“I can provide a lot of resources and insight, whether it’s building a strategy or helping performing artists tighten up their business models so that they can execute more successfully,” he says.

RENAISSANCE MAN

Through programs like those, Loucks is able to draw on his own experience as well as the skills he learned in Chapman University’s Executive MBA program, which he completed in 2017. But he’s also able to draw on the well-rounded experience he enjoyed in Scouting.

“That’s one of the nice things about Scouting: You are exploring diverse activities that may take you outside of your comfort zone, that may challenge you in ways that you don’t really want to be challenged in or that you don’t think you can do,” he says. “The brotherhood, the skills learned and exercised, the lessons that continue to inspire me today; I cannot understate how important the Scouting experience was to me, because I honestly think about it every day.” 